

# Webwatch

*In this Webwatch, we look at more free online WASH courses (and try them out!), updates on discussions on the post-2015 WASH targets, and a series of good blogposts reflecting on how to influence sector change.*

## More free online WASH courses

I wrote about the growth of free online courses for WASH professionals last year. It is great to see this trend continuing, especially making use of Massive Open Online Courseware (MOOCs) approaches.

## Introduction to Household Water Treatment and Safe Storage

This course on household water treatment is the first MOOC developed by the Department of Water and Sanitation in Developing Countries (Sandec) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (Eawag). The course covers treatment options, implementation strategies, and assessing impact. I found the presentations and videos extremely clear, and there is reference to a wealth of other material. Furthermore, this is the first MOOC that I have done which includes 'peer review' of some of the homework assignments. Instead of just multiple-choice or numerical answers marked by a computer, there is the opportunity for more detailed questions and answers which are assessed by other students. For participants in places with slow internet connections (like here in DRC!), it is possible to download transcripts and presentations instead of trying to watch the videos.

This MOOC is the first of a series that Sandec will be running on the theme 'WASH in Developing Countries'. Future courses are planned to include: Planning and Design of Sanitation Systems and Technologies; Strategic Environmental Sanitation Planning; Water Supply and Treatment; Municipal Solid Waste Management; and Excreta and Wastewater Management. I have been impressed by the effort that has gone into making this first MOOC and the commitment by the course leaders to engage with students through the online discussion forums. I would highly recommend checking out future courses in this series, starting later in 2014.

<https://www.coursera.org/course/hwts>

## Water Supply and Sanitation Policy in Developing Countries

Further WASH modules will be run through Coursera in 2014 with more of a policy focus. Developed by the University of Manchester, the first module of this MOOC will cover the political economy of water and sanitation in developing countries, supply-side and demand-side issues, historical perspectives, current patterns, and

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future prospects. Each module will last 6 weeks and will require about 8–10 hours of work per week.

<https://www.coursera.org/course/water>

## **WASH and Neglected Tropical Diseases**

Recently there has been increasing attention on the importance of WASH for addressing neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) such as soil-transmitted helminthiasis, trachoma, schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, and Guinea worm. In late 2013, the Task Force for Global Health, Emory University's Center for Global Safe Water, WaterAid, Improve International, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine piloted an e-course on WASH and NTDs with participants from 26 organizations. In April 2014, the course was launched for open access, and the material includes the impact of WASH on NTDs; planning of WASH activities for implementation in NTD-endemic areas; measuring health outcomes specific to NTDs; and advocacy and policy issues.

Unlike many MOOCs, the course also has the advantage that it can be taken at any time, instead of following set course dates. Participants can download the materials from the website and work through them at their own pace. However, this does require extra self-discipline, especially to make the effort to go through the additional reading and articles provided. I will be trying to do this in the time between the end of the first Sandec MOOC and the start of the next one!

<http://washntds.org/ecourse/course>

## **Updates on post-MDG targets and national-level commitments**

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme has updated its website to include the latest from the working groups which have been debating the targets and indicators for monitoring global progress on WASH after 2015 to replace the Millennium Development Goals. The key recommendations were presented to the UN General Assembly in September 2013 and are, by 2030, to eliminate open defecation; to achieve universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene for households, schools, and health facilities; to halve the proportion of the population without access at home to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services; and to progressively eliminate inequalities in access. The difference from the previous MDG targets is the key emphasis on sanitation, equity, the distinction between basic access and 'safely managed' services, and setting a date for reaching universal basic access.

At the 2014 Sanitation and Water for All High Level Meeting (HLM) in Washington, DC in April, further country-level commitments were made by ministers of finance and ministers responsible for water and sanitation from around the world. Many of these included new targets for eliminating open defecation, reflecting the increasing debates on how to prioritise sanitation, and how to move to sustainable services. The blog post from Erma Uytewaal at IRC reflects on the success of the HLM in attracting increased political attention (including attendance from the United

Nations' Secretary-General and the World Bank's President) and highlights the way that donors need to change their roles in many countries to better support nationally led commitments. WASH practitioners will be following these important debates to see what international and national targets are eventually adopted and the effect they may have on approaches and progress in the sector.

<http://www.wssinfo.org/post-2015-monitoring/>

<http://sanitationandwaterforall.org/priority-areas/political-prioritization/2014-hlm>

<http://waterservicesthatlast.wordpress.com/2014/04/15/>

[aftermath-of-the-sanitation-and-water-for-all-high-level-meeting/](http://waterservicesthatlast.wordpress.com/2014/04/15/aftermath-of-the-sanitation-and-water-for-all-high-level-meeting/)

## Reflections on sector change and complexity

Of course, among the international debates it is important to understand how changes happen at national sector level. In a series of blog posts, staff and partners from the IRC 'Sustainable Services at Scale' (Triple-S) and WASHCost projects reflect on their experiences of promoting sector change for rural WASH.

The team explains that from their experiences, sector change takes place in multiple stages over many years. The first step is 'triggering a shared understanding of WASH as being about universal service delivery' (rather than a series of one-off projects) and the need for change. This requires building trust and partnerships with sector actors, gradually developing a shared consensus and vision, and 'socialising' the challenges and concepts to enable common understandings. This phase can take at least a year or two, depending on the existing state of the sector.

Phase two is the 'learning and testing' part: action research, experiments and trials, iteration, and feeding lessons back into the policy discussions. This phase can take at least another three years. The third phase is when results and impact become visible; scale emerges as local stakeholders recognize and embrace the changes as their own. Of course, this is a very simplified timeline, but it provides a helpful model for others to think of their own work and how it might fit in. Here in DRC, the sector is very much at an early stage in this sort of timeline, owing to the post-conflict context and the historic (and, in some parts of the country, ongoing) humanitarian situation. However, I still found the reflection useful.

<http://waterservicesthatlast.wordpress.com/2014/03/05/>

[everyone-together-for-everyone-forever-changing-the-whole-system-in-practice/](http://waterservicesthatlast.wordpress.com/2014/03/05/everyone-together-for-everyone-forever-changing-the-whole-system-in-practice/)

In a further blogpost, the team describe what these different stages really looked like in Ghana: who did what, how did collaboration emerge, the links between implementation experiences and policy development, and where the sector is now. Importantly, they are also clear about how much it costs to facilitate these processes – for Triple-S, about US\$1 m per year per country. Given how much is spent – and, as we know, much of it wasted – on direct implementation in each country, this should actually represent good value if it can positively influence the impact of these other investments.

<http://waterservicesthatlast.wordpress.com/2014/03/27/>

[long-expensive-messy-the-realities-of-sector-change/](http://waterservicesthatlast.wordpress.com/2014/03/27/long-expensive-messy-the-realities-of-sector-change/)